

BANGLADESHI STUDENTS ENGAGE GLOBALLY THROUGH LEARNING CENTERS

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WASHINGTON, NOVEMBER 8 -- Nearly 100,000 children in Bangladesh use computers and Internet technology to communicate with each other and their teachers, even though few of their families have computers.

In other places, students too young to write are using the Internet to make drawings to learn about each other.

Bangladeshi students -- using blogs, writing essays and posting videos at 27 Internet telecenters throughout the country -- participate in international and interregional projects on climate change, folk stories, journalism, fashion, community service, the environment and Ramadan. They also create Web pages; use computers to draw, paint, and compose and record music; participate in online conferences; and write e-mails to students throughout the world.

The telecenters are operated by the Bangladesh Global Connections and Exchange Project, informally known as Global Connections in Bangladesh, a project of Relief International -- Schools Online, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) in California. The project is funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, with support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Global Catalyst Foundation.

The centers and computers in classrooms make it possible for children to collaborate globally to learn about their communities and the world.

Even very young children can benefit from Internet technology, said Andrea Hernandez, technology coordinator at the Martin J. Gottlieb Day School in Jacksonville, Florida. Students as young as 5 are participating in the widely popular international Kids h@nd in h@nd project, in which children in classrooms around the world use the Kids h@nd in h@nd Web site to draw faces to express feelings they can share with others who speak a different language.

"The program is a really simple way of showing that we might think we are so far apart but we all have the same repertoire of feelings and that we can show what we're feeling on our face," Hernandez told USINFO.

Global Connections in Bangladesh, based in Dhaka, and Kids h@nd in h@nd, developed by a schoolteacher in Belgium, are winners in the Global Junior Challenge 2007, an international competition recognizing best practices in the use of new technologies in education. The competition, sponsored by the Italian NGO Digital World Foundation, attracted 600 projects from 80 categories. The winners were announced in October.

BANGLADESH'S GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

The Bangladesh program increases global dialogue and educational opportunities by offering new ways of helping students explore their own communities in the country and introducing them to people of all walks of life, project director M. Nazrul Islam says on the program's web site.

In Bangladesh, the Internet learning centers (ILCs) are set up in geographic clusters, with five to 10 schools in each cluster. Teachers gather monthly to provide mutual support, exchange media, and test and exchange lesson plans. Islam said the monthly meetings are designed to promote local expertise and foster a sense of extended community between the participating schools. The NGO also facilitates collaborative lessons regionally and internationally within the ILC network. Although most of the lessons are developed in Bangla, international projects are created in English.

In the future, Islam said, as bandwidth and infrastructure improve in Bangladesh, the program hopes to take advantage of more interactive features of the Internet such as videoconferencing and use of remote learning resources. "We are also interested in expanding the range of media available in each center," Islam said, including podcasts and radio.

KIDS H@ND IN H@ND

Developed by Lieven Van Parys, a teacher and technology coordinator at the Free Primary Schools in Meulebeke, Belgium, the Internet project Kids h@nd in h@nd makes it simple for teachers around the world to download free software and encourage children to make drawings of people that express feelings.

First Hernandez's students looked at the drawings other schools around the world made and posted on the Kids h@nd in h@nd Web site. Then, after checking the location of participating classrooms on a globe or map and talking about the country's culture and language, Hernandez asked the students to draw a picture of how they were feeling that day. Some children drew pictures of what a face might look like if a person were embarrassed, for example.

Hernandez e-mailed the drawings to Van Parys to post on his Web site, Hernandez said, adding that the children really enjoyed seeing their work displayed online.

"When we talked about feelings and emotions and where Belgium was located, the children realized that although we speak in different languages in different countries, we have the same feelings," she said.

Additional information about the Bangladesh Global Connections and Exchange Project (<http://www.connect-bangladesh.org/>) and Kids h@nd in h@nd (<http://www.sip.be/stamand/feelings/kidshandinhand.htm>) can be found on the projects' Web sites.

A video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIRRV8heijg>) about the digital photograph studio set up in the ILC near the Chowara Girls School in Bangladesh is available on the YouTube Web site.

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Note: *A Bangla translation of this article is also available at the American Center. If you are interested in the translation, please call the American Center Press Section, Tel: 8837150-4, Fax: 9885688; e-mail: DhakaPA@state.gov; Website: [http:// dhaka.usembassy.gov](http://dhaka.usembassy.gov)*